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US scientist gives Israeli prize to Palestinians

By **AMY TEIBEL** – 16 hours ago

JERUSALEM (AP) — A Brown University professor said Monday that he is donating his share of a prestigious Israeli mathematics prize to advance the education of Palestinian students.

David Mumford said he would donate his \$33,333 portion of the Wolf Prize to a Palestinian university and an Israeli group that tries to ease Israeli travel restrictions on Palestinian students. He said he believes freedom of movement is crucial to intellectual development.

"I feel strongly that mathematics is an international enterprise, and it's really grown up essentially in every country. ... It's really important that everyone have access to higher education, to the international community where mathematics is being carried on," Mumford told The Associated Press.

He received the award at a ceremony Sunday at Israel's parliament in recognition of his groundbreaking theoretical work in algebraic geometry.

The beneficiaries are Bir Zeit University, the West Bank's flagship university, and Gisha, an Israeli organization that works to protect the rights of Palestinian students in the Gaza Strip.

For several years, Israel — citing security considerations — has banned most Palestinians from leaving the Gaza Strip. This has forced hundreds of Palestinian students to abandon or postpone university studies outside the tiny seaside territory — even if they have full scholarships to schools in Europe or the U.S. or simply want to travel the 25 miles to Palestinian universities in the West Bank.

The contrast between what goes on in Israel and what goes on in the Palestinian areas is "striking," with Israelis able "to travel freely to meetings and graduate students going wherever they please," he said.

"It seems to me in the Palestinian areas, this isn't the case," he said. "I felt very much that it was really carrying out the spirit of Wolf's own wishes to further education in all the areas of Palestine."

The Israel-based foundation was established by Ricardo Wolf, a German-born inventor, diplomat and philanthropist who spent the last years of his life as Cuba's representative in Israel, where he died in 1981.

The foundation presents five or six annual prizes, often shared. Its motto is "to promote science and art for the benefit of mankind." Mumford shared his prize with two other mathematicians.

Ilan Pilo, chief executive of the Wolf Foundation, said the foundation "does not get involved in how prize winners use the money they receive."

Mumford said he did not characterize himself as a political person, but was motivated by his conviction that "higher education, access to mathematical knowledge, is something that should be shared and should be accessible to everyone."

He said he chose Bir Zeit after having visited there four years ago. He heard about Gisha through friends, he said.

"We are grateful to Professor Mumford for the recognition his gift expresses in the universality of the right to education and its importance for the future of both peoples, Israelis and Palestinians," Gisha said in a statement. "We hope that Professor Mumford's gesture will influence Israeli officials to remove the restrictions that prevent Palestinian students from exercising their right to freedom of movement and to access educational opportunities."

A Bir Zeit spokeswoman wasn't immediately available for comment.